

From: The CIA and Overhead Reconnaissance,
The U-2 and OXCART Programs, 54-74.

25X1 by [REDACTED]

Secret [REDACTED]

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As the deliveries of U-2 airframes to the testing site increased, a major logistic problem arose: how to transfer Lockheed employees from Burbank [REDACTED] without arousing a great deal of curiosity. The project staff decided that the simplest approach would be to fly the essential personnel [REDACTED] on Monday morning and return them to Burbank on Friday evening. Frequent flights were also necessary to bring in supplies and visitors from contractors and headquarters. Therefore, a regularly scheduled [REDACTED] flight [REDACTED] aircraft began on 3 October 1955. James Cunningham promptly dubbed this activity "Bissell's Narrow-Gauge Airline." Less than seven weeks after it started, a [REDACTED] aircraft [REDACTED] crashed on 17 November, killing all 14 persons aboard the plane, including the Project Security Officer, [REDACTED] four members of his staff, and personnel from Lockheed and [REDACTED]. This crash represented the greatest single loss of life in the entire U-2 program.⁴⁸

U-2s, UFOs, AND OPERATION BLUE BOOK

High-altitude testing of the U-2 soon led to an unexpected side effect—a tremendous increase in reports of unidentified flying objects (UFOs). In the mid-1950s, most commercial airliners flew at altitudes between 10,000 and 20,000 feet and military aircraft like the B-47s and B-57s operated at altitudes below 40,000 feet. Consequently, once U-2s started flying at altitudes above 60,000 feet, air-traffic controllers began receiving increasing numbers of UFO reports.

Such reports were most prevalent in the early evening hours from pilots of airliners flying from east to west. When the sun dropped below the horizon of an airliner flying at 20,000 feet, the plane was in darkness. But, if a U-2 was airborne in the vicinity of the airliner at the same time, its horizon from an altitude of 60,000 feet was considerably more distant, and, being so high in the sky, its silver wings would catch and reflect the rays of the sun and appear to the airliner pilot, 40,000 feet below, to be fiery objects. Even during daylight hours, the silver bodies of the high-flying U-2s could catch the sun and cause reflections or glints that could be seen at lower altitudes and even on the ground. At this time, no one believed manned flight was possible above 60,000 feet, so no one expected to see an object so high in the sky.

USAF review(s)
completed.

⁴⁸ OSA History, chap. 7, pp. 17-19 (TS [REDACTED]).

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Not only did the airline pilots report their sightings to air-traffic controllers, but they and ground-based observers also wrote letters to the Air Force unit at Wright Air Development Command in Dayton charged with investigating such phenomena. This, in turn, led to the Air Force's Operation BLUE BOOK. Based at Wright-Patterson, the operation collected all reports of UFO sightings. Air Force investigators then attempted to explain such sightings by linking them to natural phenomena. BLUE BOOK investigators regularly called on the Agency's Project Staff in Washington to check reported UFO sightings against U-2 flight logs. This enabled the investigators to eliminate the majority of the UFO reports, although they could not reveal to the letter writers the true cause of the UFO sightings. U-2 and later OXCART flights accounted for more than one-half of all UFO reports during the late 1950s and most of the 1960s.⁴⁹

HIRING U-2 PILOTS

In authorizing the U-2 project, President Eisenhower told DCI Dulles that he wanted the pilots of these planes to be non-US citizens. It was his belief that, should a U-2 come down in hostile territory, it would be much easier for the United States to deny any responsibility for the activity if the pilot was not an American.

25X1 The initial effort to find U-2 pilots was assigned to the Directorate of Plans Air/Maritime Division (AMD). The DDP had excellent contacts with [] which had a number of pilots trained by the US Air Force. AMD operatives, therefore, contacted [] and asked that discreet inquiries be made to see if any US-trained fliers were interested in a high-paying covert project. Seven [] pilots were selected and brought to the United States for training. Meanwhile, AMD hired an expatriate Polish flier residing in England, and he also came to the United States for training.

25X1 In theory the use of foreign pilots seemed quite logical; in practice it did not work out. The Pole could barely speak English and could only fly light aircraft. Language was also a barrier for the [] although several were good fliers. Because Lieutenant Colonel Geary had taken a class of [] cadets through flying school at Randolph AFB in 1950, he got the job of training the []

⁴⁹ Information supplied by James Cunningham to [] (U).